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ABSTRACT

The educational leave program at the University of California, Davis, known as PELP (Planned Educational Leave Program) is examined and a comprehensive profile of students who request educational leave is given. Educational leave is described as an attempt to accommodate students who require time away from school to either gain experience in a career field or reassess their educational objectives. It is concluded that PELP is beneficial to a large number of students who wish to maintain their academic credibility while attending to problems that prevent continuous enrollment. (SPG)

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THE PLANNED EDUCATIONAL LEAVE PROGRAM

research report no. 2

office for student affairs
research and evaluation
university of california, davis

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THE PLANNED EDUCATIONAL LEAVE PROGRAM

John M. Winkworth
Don W. Sieker

Research Report #2
Office for Student Affairs
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University of California, Davis

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Introduction	1
History and Background of Educational Leave	2
Resources and Method	3
PELP at Davis: A Program Description	3
PELP Enrollment at Davis	4
The Davis Student Entering PELP	6
The Davis Student After PELP	8
Pre-Post PELP Comparisons	9
Concluding Observations	11
Bibliography	13
UCD General Catalog Description	Append. A

INTRODUCTION

In recent years colleges and universities have initiated a variety of educational changes, including open enrollment, revised academic calendars, and more liberal degree requirements. One of the most notable innovations is that of interrupting continuous study for educational leave. Referred to as "stop out," this enrollment option was first mentioned by the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education in their report Less Time, More Options (1971) and in the Newman Report on Higher Education (1971). Most recently Cross and Valley (1974) reported that of the 1,185 institutions they sampled in a nationwide survey, 83 percent permitted their students to stop out or take leaves of absence, while only 17 percent expected continuous registration. Clearly, the availability of leave opportunities testifies to more flexible enrollment policies at an increasing number of institutions throughout the country.

The appearance of these leave-taking opportunities also suggests that institutions of higher learning are responding to the educational difficulties experienced by a growing number of students. Educational leave is an attempt to accommodate students who require time away from school to either gain experience in a career field, or reassess their educational objectives. In both cases, the leave-taking concept is based on the assumption that a planned educational absence will have a positive influence on the student. It should also be stressed that a primary objective of these programs is to facilitate the student's ultimate return to a planned course of study.

The purpose of this report is to portray the educational leave program at the University of California, Davis. Known as PELP (Planned Educational Leave Program), the Program was made operational on the Davis campus in the Winter quarter, 1972. The data within this report provides a general overview of the Davis Program and a comprehensive profile of the students who request educational leave.

History and Background of Educational Leave

Several commissions have acknowledged the educational benefits of academic leave. A special report, Less Time, More Options, published by the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education (1971) identified uninterrupted study as an educational problem for an increasing number of young people, and it recommended the adoption of stop out programs for students who would profit from deferred enrollment. The Commission's report concluded that academic leave would offer students the opportunity for valuable service experience away from the university and should be approved when it supports the student's educational objectives. Similar conclusions regarding academic leave were reached by the Newman Report (Report on Higher Education, 1971). Newman advocated the breaking of the "educational lockstep," citing examples set by veterans and Peace Corpsmen. Individuals from both groups interrupted their formal studies -- either involuntarily or by choice -- and often returned to school with new purpose, satisfaction and success. Educational leave, the Report argued, might also prepare students for the awkward and apprehensive return to society after a considerable number of years spent within the university community.

Beyond these two commission reports, there has been little mention of leave programs in the research literature. Ann Heiss' recent technical report to the Carnegie Commission (An Inventory of Academic Innovation and Reform, 1973) considered the leave-program concept an important procedural innovation within the admissions office, but her only reference was to the program currently available to University of California students at Davis. K. Patricia Cross and John R. Valley (Planning Non-Traditional Programs, 1974) inquired about leave-taking programs in their survey, but confined their discussion to reporting on the availability of these programs among the institutions they studied. The present study is an attempt to add to the literature on leave programs by examining in detail the leave program presently operational at Davis.

RESOURCES AND METHOD

Two separate instruments were employed to gather data for this report. The first was an application form required of all students requesting educational leave. Students were asked to state their reasons for seeking educational leave, to estimate the amount of time needed, and to supply information in a number of other areas (i.e., age, sex, class standing and major). A second instrument was employed to gather information from students who had completed their PELP. This PELP questionnaire requested information in a number of categories similar to those on the application form. In addition, the questionnaire asked students to restate their reasons for requesting leave, to provide information concerning their leave activities, and to evaluate the Program.

Application data was gathered from 1,140 students who had applied for leave over a four quarter period, beginning in the Winter quarter of 1972 and terminating with the end of the Winter quarter of 1973. From this group, 580 students who had completed their PELP by the end of Winter quarter, 1973 were randomly selected to receive questionnaires. Three hundred and fourteen students responded to the questionnaire, or 54 percent of the 580 sampled. This modest return rate is a fairly serious limitation in that it raises some questions about the representativeness of the sample. As a result, generalizations about the entire PELP population should be cautiously made.

PELP AT DAVIS: A PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

First adopted in Winter quarter, 1972, the leave-granting program at Davis incorporates the major recommendations set forth in the Carnegie and Newman reports. All registered students, undergraduate and graduate, are eligible for enrollment (see Appendix A). Each student must complete an application and state his reasons for seeking leave; in addition, students are required to indicate the quarter they plan on resuming their studies. PELP at Davis

acknowledges a variety of explanations in support of leave-taking. For example, students may stop out to pursue job opportunities, clarify educational goals, or resolve personal problems. The Program is designed to assist students in deferring their formal education, while insuring student reentry without procedural difficulty. An academic dean must approve all leave requests; also, students are required to pay a small service fee. Readmission is guaranteed the student who returns from leave on the date specified in his application. At Davis, one full academic year is considered the maximum leave. Students have the option, however, to request additional leave time if it is required. It should also be noted that UCD students are well aware of the Program's existence. Data collected from the Davis Student Survey, conducted in the Spring quarter of 1973, indicated that 88 percent of all undergraduates had heard of PELP.

PELP Enrollment at Davis

The number of students applying for PELP has grown impressively since the Program's adoption. Over 1,000 students applied for educational leave during the 1972-73 academic year, and nearly this number throughout 1973-74. Table 1 includes the quarterly and calendar totals for all PELP applicants beginning Winter quarter, 1972 and ending in the Spring quarter, 1974.

TABLE 1

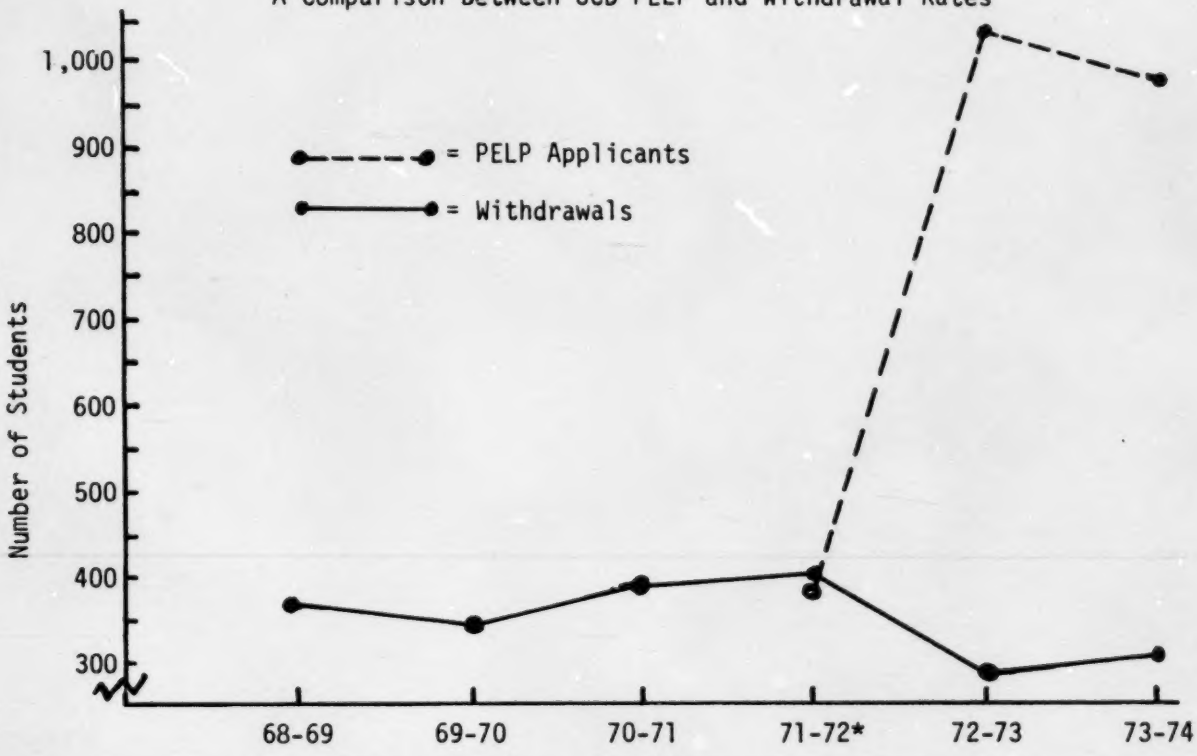
PELP Enrollment Figures
(Winter 1972-Spring 1974)

Quarter	Academic Year		
	1971-72	1972-73	1973-74
Fall	--	436	286
Winter	158	300	380
Spring	246	292	308
TOTAL	404	1,028	974

The extent to which PELP participation affected the withdrawal figures at UC Davis is suggested by the material presented in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1

A Comparison Between UCD PELP and Withdrawal Rates



*PELP began in Winter 1972 so PELP figure for 1971-72 only represents two quarters.

During the 1971-72 academic year, the Registrar's Office reported that 401 students had officially withdrawn from the University. By the following year, the first complete year of PELP, this figure had dropped to 290, representing a decrease in student withdrawals of almost 30 percent. Although there is no way of knowing how many students rejected withdrawal in favor of PELP participation, the data suggest that educational leave is having an impact on the official withdrawal rate at UCD. This suggestion is corroborated in part by the discovery that 20 percent of the students responding to the PELP questionnaire reported considering withdrawal prior to making their decision to go on PELP.

The Davis Student Entering PELP

The data collected from the 1,140 PELP applicants going on leave between the Winter quarter, 1972 and the conclusion of the Winter quarter, 1973 provides a useful profile of the Davis student entering PELP. Eighty-five percent of the applicants were from one of the three undergraduate colleges, while the remaining 15 percent were enrolled in the graduate division. This signifies an under-representation of graduate students, who comprise a little more than 25 percent of the total student population on the campus. It was also discovered that the college affiliation of undergraduate applicants closely paralleled the actual percentages within the three colleges: Agricultural and Environmental Sciences (36 percent); Engineering (7 percent); Letters and Science (58 percent). By class level, most undergraduate PELP applicants were upper-division students (68 percent), which is approximately 10 percent higher than their proportion in the undergraduate population. Juniors (42 percent) and seniors (26 percent) were over-represented, while freshmen (12 percent) were under-represented. The percentage of sophomores (20 percent) was similar to their total campus proportion. Finally, the percentage of men and women applicants (men, 58 percent; women, 42 percent) closely approximates their percentage in the total campus population.

The application form supplied two additional kinds of data useful to this report. Students were asked to state the amount of time (in quarters) they expected to defer their formal studies and the reasons in support of their leave request. Table 2 presents an analysis of the anticipated length of the leave by the quarter in which the student made his application.

TABLE 2

Anticipated Length of PELP, By Quarter
(in percent)

Quarter	Length		
	One Quarter	Two Quarters	Three Quarters
Fall	43	11	45
Winter	47	39	13
Spring	80	6	13
TOTAL	58	17	25

More than half (58 percent) of all applicants requested a leave of absence for one quarter. This was a particularly popular choice during the Spring quarter when eight out of every ten applicants anticipated a one quarter leave. One-fourth of the applicants anticipated a three quarter leave, with the largest percentage making application in the Fall. The two quarter PELP, selected by 17 percent of all the applicants, was chosen most frequently in the Winter quarter.

The various reasons provided by applicants requesting leave ranged from personal and family problems to the clarification of educational objectives. Because applicants were permitted to cite more than one reason to explain their need for leave-taking, the percentages listed in Table 3 exceed 100 percent. It should be emphasized that these reasons were given by PELP applicants prior to the approval of their leave.

TABLE 3

Principal Reasons Submitted by PELP
Applicants for Educational Leave
(in percent, N=1,140)

Reasons	
Employment: Financial Need	35
Clarification of Educational Goals	32
Employment: Experience	18
Other	14

TABLE 3 (cont.)

Reason	
Travel	12
Resolve Personal Problems	12
Purpose of College Education Unclear	9
Illness	7
Dissatisfied with Academic Pursuits	7
Resolve Family Problems	6
Enrollment in Another College	5
Military Service	2
Education Abroad	2
Marriage	2

The figures in Table 3 indicate that the two primary reasons given by applicants for their educational leave were 1) to obtain employment because of the need for finances (35 percent), and 2) to clarify educational goals (32 percent). Though markedly different, both of these reasons are equally effective in preventing progress toward the attainment of a college degree.

The Davis Student After PELP

The questionnaire data furnished by the 314 respondents who had completed their educational leave provide some insight into the value of the PELP program at Davis. The fact that all but 8 percent of the respondents returned to the University (83 percent were continuing their studies while 9 percent had graduated) demonstrates the effectiveness of the PELP experience in facilitating the student's return to college work. (It could be argued that this is an inflated rate brought about by the low number of questionnaires returned by individuals who have not returned to the University. Given the 54 percent return rate, this would seem to be a plausible explanation, but one which needs verification.)

In addition, the following statistics make it clear that the majority of PELP recipients considered their educational leave a satisfying and necessary

experience. For example, of the 314 students responding to the subject of Program satisfaction, 70 percent rated their PELP as very satisfactory, another 24 percent considered it fairly satisfactory, while only 6 percent expressed some degree of disappointment. Almost half (49 percent) of those sampled stated that their leave time was helpful in the clarification of educational goals. Eighty-one percent of those who gave non-academic explanations for leave stated that they achieved their originally planned objectives while on PELP. Over half (52 percent) of the sampled group indicated that during their leave period they developed a set of objectives. And when asked to evaluate their performance after reentry, 62 percent acknowledged definite academic improvement. PELP recipients were also pleased with the lack of administrative obstacles throughout the application process. In fact, 95 percent of the group reported little or no difficulty in obtaining leave approval. In short, a high percentage of respondents expressed general satisfaction with the Program; and it appears from the collected data that most students profited -- to some extent -- from their leave of absence.

Pre-Post PELP Comparisons

Comparison data obtained on both the application and the questionnaire provide some tentative answers to two additional questions about PELP students. The first question, of special interest to the Registrar's Office, is "Do they come back when they say they will?". Table 4 presents data which sheds some light on the accuracy of student expectations in regard to their time on PELP.

TABLE 4

Comparison of Expected with Actual PELP Leave
(in percent, N=314)

Expected Length of PELP		Actual Length of PELP
1 quarter	77	70
2 quarters	15	20
3 quarters	8	10

The figures in Table 4 indicate a large majority of students responding to the PELP questionnaire anticipated a leave of one quarter duration. The figures for the actual length of leave taken present a comparable figure with seven out of ten remaining on PELP for only one quarter. While it is somewhat tempting to assume that the 70 percent of the students are included within the 77 percent figure, the data in Table 4 reflect only the total group's response and reveal nothing about the consistency of individuals.

A second question about PELP students is: "Are their stated reasons for going on PELP their real reasons?". The information given in Table 5 presents a comparison of the major reasons for PELP given prior to leave approval and after completion of the leave.

TABLE 5

Comparison of Major Reasons for PELP Given Before Entry and After Completion by Rank and Percent (N=314)

Reason	At Entry		After Completion	
	Rank	%	Rank	%
Clarification of Educational Goals	2	18	4	11
Employment: Financial Need	1	20	3	12
Employment: Experience	3	11	7	6
Travel	4	10	4	11
Resolve Personal Problems	6	7	2	16
Illness	8	5	9	4.1
Purpose of College Education Unclear	7	6	8	4.5
Dissatisfied with Academic Pursuits	9	4	6	10
Resolve Family Problems	9	4	11	2
Enrollment in Another College	11	2.5	14	<1
Military Service	12	2.3	11	2
Education Abroad	13	2	13	1
Marriage	14	1	11	2
Other	5	9	1	17

The contrast between reasons given at the time of application and those stated after completion of PELP is considerable in a number of instances. At the time of application, 31 percent gave reasons of employment. However, after the PELP experience only 18 percent gave employment as the major reason for PELP. The sharpest increase was with the reason "to resolve personal problems." Initially this reason ranked sixth, selected by 7 percent of the applicants. After PELP it ranked second in importance, given by 16 percent of the respondents.

A number of explanations for the disparity seem possible. It might be that students were more candid in acknowledging their leave requirements after gaining leave approval. It is quite possible that many students were apprehensive about submitting reasons which administrators might consider inappropriate. Another explanation might be that certain problems arose after the leave commenced which necessitated a change in plans.

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

The data presented in this report allow for some qualified observations regarding PELP at Davis. For one thing, a high percentage of Program participants returned to their studies after leave convinced that educational leave was influential in confirming their academic objectives. Secondly, an even higher percentage noted that leave enabled them to develop a set of objectives that eluded them during full-time study. Equally supportive of the Program's benefits were those students who acknowledged definite academic improvement after readmission.

It would be misleading to assume, however, that all students are suitable candidates for PELP assistance. There are, for example, those for whom college was an inappropriate choice in the first place. Obviously the Program can do little to assist students in this category. But PELP does appear to be an appropriate choice for a good many other students. It has, for example, assisted

those who are temporarily confused about the meaning of their educational experience. For others, PELP has provided the necessary time to resolve personal and financial problems. In short, the Program appears ideally suited to those students who wish to maintain their academic credibility while attending to problems that prevent continuous enrollment.

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APPENDIX A

UCD General Catalog Description

Planned Educational Leave Program

Planned Educational Leave is defined as a planned interruption or pause in a student's regular education during which he temporarily ceases his formal studies at Davis while pursuing other activities that may assist in clarifying his educational goals, provide job opportunities and practical experience away from the campus, allow time for the solution of personal problems, and enhance the prospect of successful completion of his academic program. The intent of the Program is to make it possible for a student to suspend his academic work, leave the campus, and later resume his studies with a minimum of procedural difficulty.

Any registered student at the Davis campus, undergraduate or graduate, is eligible to enroll in the Planned Educational Leave Program. Freshmen who have been admitted but have not yet registered are also eligible, the intent being to provide an opportunity for beginning students to pause between high school and college. Professional schools have special guidelines for the participation of their students in this Program.

Each applicant for enrollment in the Program is required to file an application form, including a brief explanation of his reasons for leaving the Davis campus, and must state in writing when he intends to resume his academic work. The appropriate dean must approve the application. The minimum Planned Educational Leave is one full quarter; the normal maximum is one full academic year. A student may request an extension of his Leave. For purposes of this Program, leave of one full quarter is defined as a leave commencing no later than the second week of instruction in a quarter.

It is expected that students enrolled in the Program will devote their leave period primarily to non-classroom activities. Students on Planned Educational Leave are not eligible to enroll in concurrent courses on the Davis campus and shall not earn academic credit at Davis during the period of the Leave.

At the end of his Planned Educational Leave, a student is guaranteed readmission if he resumes his regular academic work at the agreed upon date. Students who do not return at the prearranged time and do not extend their leave, will be considered to have withdrawn.

A fee of $20 is charged, payable when a student enrolls in the Program. There are no additional charges, other than normal quarterly registration fees, upon his return. In total amount, this fee is identical to that paid by a student who withdraws and is required to pay a readmission fee when he returns. (The readmission fee is collected in advance.) A student is not eligible to receive normal University services during the period of his planned leave. Certain limited services, however, such as Placement Services, Counseling Services, faculty advising, and Draft Counseling are available. Male students are urged to consult the Office for Selective Service and Veterans Affairs before they depart. Grants and other financial aids will be discontinued for the period of the leave, but every effort will be made, where legally possible, to allow a student to renegotiate loan payment schedules and to insure the availability of financial aids upon his return.

For applications and specific information about the Planned Educational Leave Program, students should consult the Counseling Center, located in North Hall. In addition, students may consult the appropriate Dean's Office, the Registrar, The First Resort, or their faculty advisers.